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From: Ludwigsen, Emily
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Subject: RE: CO Spill - Clips

Associated Press (via Tuscon News Now)

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<http://www.tucsonnewsnow.com/story/29750718/colorado-mine-spill-3-times-larger-than-believed-feds-say>

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Colorado mine spill 3 times larger than believed, feds say

AP

August 10, 1:06 PM

DENVER (AP) - Federal officials say the yellow plume of contaminated wastewater that spilled from an abandoned Colorado mine states is three times larger than originally estimated.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says 3 million gallons of wastewater laced with lead and arsenic, spilled from the Gold King Mine and turned the Animas River a mustard yellow last week. The agency initially estimated 1 million gallons escaped.

The river flows through New Mexico and Utah and ultimately into Lake Mead.

The EPA has so far been unable to determine whether humans or aquatic life face health risks from the pollution, but an agency official said Sunday that she doesn't believe wildlife is in great danger.

No drinking-water contamination has been reported because water utilities shut down their intake valves ahead of the plume to keep it out of their systems.

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Bulletin Leader

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<http://www.bulletinleader.com/sludge-from-colorado-mine-spill-heads-down-river-to-nm/21908/>

Sludge from Colorado mine spill heads down river to NM

Sam Kerry

August 10

Lead poisoning, on the other hand, may lead to muscle and vision problems for adults, kidney disease, harm fetus and child development and possibly death in children. As the murky water traveled 50 miles from Silverton, it tumbled over rocks that kept it stirred. The Animas River cuts through the park. The bright orange color comes from sediment.

"It's here for a while, no doubt about it", said Butch Knowlton, director of La Plata County's Office of Emergency Management. The EPA says tests also were being done there, but no more information has been released. Toxic wastewater has continued to flow from the mine ever since.

Gov. Susana Martinez said the New Mexico Environment Department is working around the clock to monitor the situation in the Animas River.

Federal officials said Saturday that the rate was down from about 740 gallons per minute on Friday. Companies that run river tours canceled hundreds of reservations during what should be their busiest month.

Meanwhile, New Mexico officials blasted the EPA for not warning them sooner about the contamination headed their way. However, there is no estimate as to when exactly the wastewater will completely disappear. Portable water stations were also set up for the areas and officials ask that people and their pets "avoid contact with the water".

"When I first saw it, I was speechless, [the river] didn't look real", said Durango, Colorado, resident Ian Lucier. But three days after the spill, the agency said it still doesn't know what the possible environmental and health impacts are.

Silverton and San Juan County officials have resisted efforts to launch a full-scale federal "Superfund" cleanup to address this problem due to fears of a stigma that could hurt the tourism they count on for business.

"There will be accountability and those are conversations we can have", Flynn said.

The river had begun to clear up in Silverton, McClain-Vanderpool said. "The EPA causes all of this and then they say, "Oh well" and nothing happens".

It's prompted communities along the route to shut off valves leading to water supplies since the Animas is the main feed into the San Juan River.

Many were demanding answers including the president of The Navajo Nation. Results were expected on Friday night (August 7). Water that had been stored behind the collapsed material leaked into the Center Creek accessible to the Animas River.

"Until we know what we're up against and what the effects will be, we're saying, 'Be cautious, '" Baker said.

Water moves more quickly through boulders and gravel than it does dirt, clay, sand and fine silts, Knowlton said.

"I have some areas that need water right now". "This is going to be a long-term impact". Those who caused the contamination failed to warn New Mexico authorities, who are understandably miffed. If you live in the Animas River or San Juan River flood plain and your wellhead is at roughly the same level as the river, the Environment Department advises you to refrain from using the water for cooking and drinking or any human or animal ingestion until further notice.

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EcoWatch

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Massive Mine Waste Spill Reaches New Mexico

Nadia Prupis

August 10, 9:25 AM

Just days after workers with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) accidentally spilled a million gallons of toxic mine waste into a Colorado waterway, the free-flowing sludge that turned portions of the state's Animas River orange reached New Mexico, where health and wildlife officials say they were not alerted to any impending contamination.

The Animas River in Colorado turned orange with toxins after a spill sent a million gallons of mine waste into a waterway last week. Photo credit: La Plata County Emergency Management

The Animas River in Colorado turned orange with toxins after a spill sent a million gallons of mine waste into a waterway last week. Photo credit: La Plata County Emergency Management

As the cities of Aztec and Bloomfield scrambled to cut off the river's access to water treatment plants, they criticized the EPA for what they said was a lackluster effort in providing warnings or answers about the spill. The contaminants seeping into the river—at a rate of 548 gallons per minute—include arsenic, copper, zinc, lead, aluminum and cadmium.

The Animas flows into the San Juan River in New Mexico, which in turn joins the Colorado River in Utah's Lake Powell.

Workers unleashed the waste while using heavy machinery to investigate toxic materials at Colorado's non-functioning Gold King Mine. But the accident, while "unexpected" by EPA's admission, is a reminder that defunct mines still heavy with contaminants exist throughout the West.

The Associated Press writes:

Until the late 1970s there were no regulations on mining in most of the region, meaning anyone could dig a hole where they liked and search for gold, silver, copper or zinc. Abandoned mines fill up with groundwater and snowmelt that becomes tainted with acids and heavy metals from mining veins which can trickle into the region's waterways. Experts estimate there are 55,000 such abandoned mines from Colorado to Idaho to California and federal and state authorities have struggled to clean them for

decades. The federal government says 40 percent of the headwaters of Western waterways have been contaminated from mine runoff.

There are a number of factors which contribute to the abandonment of such sites. One is cost, as cleaning up toxic materials can be an expensive endeavor. But more complex is the legal liability involved. According to the Clean Water Act, anyone who “[d]ischarges a pollutant from a point source into a water of the U.S.” without a permit can be prosecuted for a federal crime, even if they were trying to clean up pollution. That has prevented green groups from engaging in those cleanup efforts—particularly as an ongoing push for a “Good Samaritan” exception to the law has gone ignored by the federal government, AP writes.

“There’s still a whole generation of abandoned mines that needs to be dealt with,” Steve Kandell of Trout Unlimited, one of the organizations backing the “Good Samaritan” bill, told the AP.

Yet that ongoing issue is exactly what the EPA crew had been attempting to address last week—and the reason it won’t accept help. The Denver Post reports:

Silverton and San Juan County officials have resisted efforts to launch a full-scale federal “Superfund” cleanup to address this problem due to fears of a stigma that could hurt the tourism they count on for business.

“These are historic abandoned mines that have had acid drainage for decades. That is the very reason why we were up there,” EPA regional chief McGrath said. “We were trying to reach that drainage coming off the Gold King Mine. They were trying to put in a treatment system.

“We have been in conversations with the town of Silverton ... and the state of Colorado about listing this area under Superfund. And if it is listed then, of course, removal (of waste) is part of Superfund that would allow us to take action up there. We have not been able to move this area to a listing under the Superfund.”

In the meantime, cities have closed access of the river to recreational and agricultural users, while health and wildlife officials conduct additional tests to determine the potential impacts of the spill. Long-term exposure to arsenic and lead can be fatal to humans.

Recent heavy rains have also raised the prospect that some of the waste which washed up onshore as it flowed down the Animas last week would rinse back out into the river, causing additional damage.

"It's hard to know what is going to happen as more river flows join it," EPA's on-scene coordinator Craig Myers, in Durango, told the Post. "It is diluting. (The sludge of contaminants) is going to be settling out in places."

La Plata county director of emergency management Butch Knowlton was more direct in his assessment. "The population that lives along this river is at the mercy of the EPA," he said.

Forbes

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<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ericmack/2015/08/09/the-epa-caused-a-huge-toxic-spill-now-streaming-toward-lake-powell/>

The EPA Caused A Huge Toxic Spill Now Streaming Toward Lake Powell

Eric Mack

August 9, 2:13 PM

Farmington, N.M. — The waters of the Animas River flowed a bright carrot orange past the Riverside Nature Center in Farmington Saturday morning where an electronic sign in the parking lot flashed the unusual news: "RIVER CLOSED." An equally steady stream of curious citizens parked just beyond the sign to make the quick walk to the riverbank and snap a picture of the fouled river with their phones.

"It's just sad," said one woman standing on the bank while others shouted and strained to keep intrigued dogs and children away from the water.

A toxic plume of one million gallons of untreated wastewater accidentally released by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) workers from a closed mine upriver in Silverton, Colorado last Wednesday is to blame for the Animas' dramatically different hue from its normal color. Ordinarily, this river runs with deep blue and green waters, the type of which could be still be observed in the adjacent waters of the San Juan River upstream of the point just outside town where the Animas empties into it.

Beyond Farmington, the San Juan flows into Utah where it joins the Colorado River at Lake Powell, itself not far upstream from the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

By Saturday afternoon, the Animas was still emptying unknown amounts of heavy metals, perhaps including lead, arsenic, cadmium, aluminum and others into the San Juan, while a crowd of hundreds gathered in the Farmington Civic Center directed another kind of emotional reaction at Mark Hayes, who had the unenviable distinction of being the only person on stage at an emergency public meeting employed by the EPA.

"This is bull shit!" shouted more than one angry member of the audience on multiple occasions during the forum, but the comment was almost always directed at Hayes, who responded compassionately and empathetically, but with frustratingly little in terms of specifics, even referring the crowd to the agency web site for more information at one point.

Hayes was joined on stage by New Mexico Environment Secretary Kevin Flynn, State Engineer Tom Blaine, U.S. Congressmen Ben Ray Lujan (D), and local officials who all repeated warnings to stay away from the river and to refrain from using the water for irrigating, watering livestock or using wells within the floodplain until further notice. All the officials also took turns expressing their frustration with EPA's slow reaction to the accident, although in a more polite tone.

"This needs to be moved up to number one priority (for the EPA)," said Rep. Lujan. "This is an emergency."

Lujan said he was disappointed that EPA representatives had notified other affected agencies of the accident via email rather than personal calls or meetings and that many agencies were getting information on the incident from reports in the press before hearing it first-hand from the federal government.

Those disappointments were echoed by Flynn, who tried to calm the raucous crowd while at the same time laying into the EPA himself.

"Look, I've sued EPA twice," he told the audience, which responded with cheers. "But let's please try to be respectful as well."

Throughout it all, a beleaguered Hayes mainly repeated his refrain that the agency had begun sampling and testing the river to determine exactly what elements lurked in its contaminated waters, but that results were still forthcoming, but he assured the crowd that EPA would work to mitigate long-term impacts on agriculture and the environment in the region.

"I want you all to know that the Environment Department isn't waiting for EPA... I've been wearing the same clothes for three days," said Flynn. "We've been here doing testing of our own, and there is a lag time because those samples have to be sent off to a lab."

UPDATE: On Sunday morning, EPA posted preliminary test results from samples taken in Silverton, not far from the spill site, which show elevated levels of metals including aluminum, calcium, copper, iron, lead, magnesium and zinc. Results from samples taken further downstream are still forthcoming.

The toxic plume is expected to cross the Utah border Monday morning and enter Lake Powell Wednesday evening.